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ABSTRACT

The root of many of the problems in education today is the shift in values from humanism to humanitarianism. While humanism elevates the individual, humanitarianism attempts to elevate mankind in general. Humanists feel that human problems stem from faults within individuals, and that the central purpose in life is to improve and discipline oneself. Humanitarians believe that human problems are caused by society and that the chief task is to correct social ills. Today's overspecialization causes people to forget humanistic values and focus only on their own microscopic areas of knowledge. Also people today suffer from an inability to apply knowledge to everyday problems. However, progress can be made if education returns to an emphasis on humanistic values, to an emphasis on individuals rather than society, and to an emphasis on self-discipline rather than social problems. Emphasis must be placed on the development of critical faculties and stringent moral values. Furthermore, each person must begin to accept more individual responsibility for self-improvement and for improving the immediate surroundings. (Author/JM)

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A HUMANIST EDUCATOR'S VIEW OF CURRENT EDUCATION PROBLEMS

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Although not a philosopher by training, I take delight in looking about and reflecting on current problems in education. I harbor strong feelings on some questions facing all of us concerning both education and the quality of life. (In my mind the two are related) Quality of life and education are both important to humanists. I hope to add some understanding to these concerns, speaking as an educator and humanist. The essence of my remarks is a distillate of ideas of other, and more wise people, but collected and orchestrated to reflect my own personal feelings and beliefs. The main points follow.

1. A value shift from Humanism to Humanitarianism is at the root of education (and other) problems.
2. Overspecialization and the inability to apply knowledge gained contribute to current problems. (There is a difference between knowledge and wisdom!)* Value considerations are important.
3. Progress can be made by applying principles of humanism, by attention to individuals rather than to society, by education's concern for humanism, and by attention to the humanities.
4. Each one of us -- individually -- must demonstrate proper values, enter into rational dialogues on issues, and accept individual responsibility. Each one should do his/her part to improve the immediate surroundings.

The last three points are related to the first, and subordinate to it. The value shift away from humanism is, in my mind, the major cause of many of our problems today. Let's examine each point.

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*H. Hesse, Siddhartha. "Wisdom is not communicable. . . Knowledge can be communicated, but not wisdom. One can find it, live it, be fortified by it, do wonders through it, but one cannot communicate and teach it." New Directions Publishing, N.Y. N.Y. p. 144.

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1. Many current problems can be traced to a shift in philosophy and values from humanism to humanitarianism.

First, let's clarify the terms "humanism" and "humanitarianism". Several concepts are at the heart of any understanding of the difference. These concepts are: the individual, self-control, selection, judgment, criteria, criticism, discipline, dialogue, dualism, balance. They appear throughout this text.

Listen to Irving Babbitt, an American humanist who died in 1933:*

> "A person who has sympathy for mankind in the lump, faith in its future progress, and desire to serve the great cause or this progress should be called not a humanist but a humanitarian . . ." (Babbitt: 6)

According to Babbitt (p.6), the poet Schiller expressed humanitarian -- not humanist -- views when he would "clasp the millions to his bosom and bestow a kiss upon the whole world". The humanist is more selective in his caresses. . . . The humanist, Cicero, knew that the key to the good life was disciplined and selective sympathy. . . . The humanist is interested in the individual; the humanitarian emphasizes schemes to elevate mankind as a whole. "Cosmopolitan breadth of knowledge and sympathy do not by themselves suffice; to be humanized, these qualities need to be tempered by discipline and selection. . . . The true humanist maintains a just balance between sympathy and selection."

The humanitarian viewpoint leads to high-sounding, hard-to-refute and often sacharrine literature, such as John Donne's "No Man is an Island"

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*Babbitt may have been a prophet. ". . . try to trace from its origins that great naturalistic and humanitarian movement which is not only taking the place of the humanistic point of view, but actually rendering it unintelligible for people of the present generation" (p.21).

sermon, ("Ask not for whom the bells toll; they toll for thee") or Terence's "Sum homo. . ." (I am a man and whatever affects mankind, affects me). The literature of humanism is more egocentric, more individual and personal, more "aristocratic", and more introspective; for example, Frost's "The Road not Taken".

> Two roads diverged in a wood, and I -
> I took the one less travelled by
> And that has made all the difference.

Or Horace's line: "Odi profanum vulgus et arceo." (I hate the common crowd, and I stand apart from it).

How has this philosophy shift influenced the current state of affairs? The move from humanism (with its concern for the individual) to humanitarianism (with its concern for mankind in general) brought a concurrent change in mankind's outlook on the world. A "love" of humanity became more important than self-control. The idea of demanding that a person first show self-control and self-governance before attempting governance over others lost favor.

The humanist cares little for the power to act on society and the world; the power to act upon self is most to be achieved. New Deal, New Frontier and Great Soceity programs made it easy not to care -- some agency would care for you. Government programs and processes evolved to reward unemployment, debt, mediocrity and non-work instead of humanism's values of work, initiative, thrift and disciplined growth. Withholding taxes reduced the need for frugality, discipline and self-control. Programs to promote social equality at all costs stifled an individual's freedom to be "unequal" based on achievement and merit.

> A manly and lawful passion for equality. . . tends to elevate the humble to the rank of the great; but there exists also in the human heart a depraved taste for equality which impels the weak to attempt to lower the powerful to their own level and reduces mankind to prefer equality in slavery to inequality with freedom. (Tocqueville. Democracy in America.)

Whitehead (p. 13) said that "the valuable intellectual development is self-development." Historically, the humanities and a liberal education had the ask of exploring and refining human needs and values. It was an ethical effort. Humanism stressed (1) that "human character is neither acquired by nature nor imposed by authority -- it is an ideal attained through critical inquiry"*, and (2) "that each one is, in principle, capable of undertaking such inquiry and arriving at defensible convictions about how life should be lived. The best of all societies is one in which citizens are equipped for life through education". (Murchland, p.22, emphasis added).

Humanitarianism, on the other hand, with befuddling, often addled logic, has nurtured at least two generations on nutritionless flummery by espousing uncritical charity -- help everyone, whether they deserve it or not; other people's burdens are your burdens and they deserve charity - - - just because they exist. And what is the reward for this uncritical largess? Some results are sloth, corruption, huge welfare rolls while jobs go unfilled, schemes for longer and longer dependence instead of plans to put individuals to work on necessary and meaningful jobs, one-upsmanship and "keep up with the Joneses."

This philosophy has generated a "let them do it" attitude. What

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*Elliot Eisner's distinctions between criticism and connoisseurship may be useful here. "Connoisseurship is the art of appreciation; criticism is the art of disclosure." Critical inquiry would be akin to dailogue.

Buber would call the "I-Thou" relationship has not developed. We-They relationships are fruitful and multiply. In We-They relationships there is no dialogue (there are not dialogue's requisite first and second persons); things are plural and in a subject-object (not subject/subject) relationship. The individual is subsumed by the group and the second person does not even exist. The third person is impersonal, something talked at and about. This sterile, antiseptic process removes individuals from any concern or responsibility.

How does this manifest itself? In unconscionable avoidance of personal responsibility; in "let them do it" or "Gallup Poll" syndromes. I won't pick up litter on the street because there is a city street department. I will buy soft drinks in nonreturnable cans because everybody else does. I shift responsibility for conscious action from myself to "they" -- to some amorphous organization, bureaucracy, group or agency.

The above demonstrate my belief that many current problems are occasioned by the shift in values and philosophy from humanism to humanitarianism. The next point is closely related to the first.

2. Over-specialization has resulted in the inability of individuals to apply knowledge gained to the solution of problems. Our behavior is a manifestation of our value orientations. If we talk about our beliefs but don't act on them, we are walking paradoxes -- or worse.

Whitehead identified this as an educational problem when he said that "education is the acquistition of the art of the utilization of knowledge". It's not a question of quantity of ideas, but rather of how people use what they learn. Educated individuals are responsible for how they use ideas. Epictetus once stated: "Men are not responsible for ideas that present themselves to their consciousness,

though they are wholly responsible for the way in which they use those ideas." And this use must be based on humanistic concerns! Over-specialization* causes people to forget humanistic values and focus only on their own microscopic areas of knowledge. Often they pursue some technology without asking the question, "Why?" They are concerned only with how to do something or how to do something better; seldom do they pause and reflect, "Should it be done in the first place?"

Even as staid a specialized group as physicians has become concerned about humanities and values. (Note the rise of concern for ethics for law, business, education, engineering, agriculture, and other fields.) In his article, "Humanities and Human Values in Medical Education", Pellegrino airs a concern about the dearth of philosophy, morals, and ethics in the training of young physicians. Ethics/morals are becoming part of the curriculum in more than half the medical schools in the United States. And why? Because doctors were concentrating on the technology of medicine and neglecting the value of medicine, and the moral/ethical questions which undergird medicine.

In the minds of many, the humanities provide detached and unrealistic knowledge. They are the arts, music, poetry. They aren't "hard" disciplines like sciences. They don't lead immediately to high-paying jobs. However, to the humanist, "knowledge is a function of the good life and there is an indissoluble bond between intellect and emotion". Pure reason has no place, for there is no use of reason that does not have some moral utility. (Murchland. Quote and Paraphrase). .

Humanism requires a constant striving to learn how to act -- and to welcome and love the responsibility of acting properly. Actions must

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*Heinlen once said, I forget where: "Specialization is for insects".

be in accordance with criteria and standards of excellence. The individual must count and benefit.

The two foregoing points are closely interrelated. How can they be used in education? What can you and I, as individuals, do?

3. Although many current problems stem both from education and the use of education, progress can be made by applying principles of humanism, by attention to individuals rather to society, and by education's concern for humanism. Education has strayed from a core of humanistic values to its detriment and to the detriment of the individuals education should serve.

John T. Foudy, in The Educational Principles of American Humanism, reviews the history of humanism in education and derives some principles. Many of his principles are excellent as guides to understanding education's humanistic role in society.

Many view humanities narrowly as study of philosophy, literature and language (particularly the "Classics" of Rome and Greece). However, in a humanistic education, study of any discipline or of language cannot take the place of ideas. In the past, humanism may have treated classical writers and ideas too much as isolated phenomena: it may have failed to relate these in a broad and vital way to daily life. Educators failed in the responsibility of linking ideas to the concept of the good life. Educators failed to realize that humanism differs essentially from humanitarianism. Humanism depends upon an admiration for self-discipline, dialogue and directed study, and recognizes that human nature is weak. A humanist would believe that problems which beset society are always fundamentally due to weaknesses in human nature.*

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*The Humanitarian, typically, would contend that the individual's problems are caused by society and that if we could improve society, then the individual would improve. Let's put the blame on "society" then no one is at fault. This argument is specious.

The humanist, and especially the humanist educator, must vivify the concept of ought -- the educator must be one who does something because it ought to be done. Educators must recognize and embody the sine qua non(s) of "the good life" -- they must do things because they ought to be done before they can advocate and teach them.

The humanist believes that human nature is partly material and partly spiritual, a notion which stems directly from the concept of dualism. To be well-ordered, people must be moderate; the foundations of moderation and self-control can be found only in dualism. Humans are animals capable of rational acts and endowed with intellect and will. In Old Wine, New Bottles, Moses Hadas, the classical scholar, says that it is reason which distinguished humans from animals, and it's the greater abundance of reasonable abilities which distinguish superior humans from the inferior. (Page 35, paraphrase). These rational abilities and language are the foundation of dialogue. They provide humankind with tools whereby the spiritual nature can, through reason, gain supremacy over the material nature. This is a constant struggle.

Konnert and Graff (p.3) establish some guidelines for the humanist education needed today.

> Perhaps the most important element in the core of a personal philosophy is humanism. . .. Humanism is the chief factor in integrating an individual's values into a consistent, comprehensive and workable whole. . . This is equivalent to saying that moral or ethical values constitute a basic and integrating factor in any personal philosophy.

Does this mean that a humanistic education would advocate classes on moral development (so popular in many schools today)? No! Such courses are remedial or compensatory education for a generation raised on humanitarianism. Humanism is taught primarily by example.

The humanist insists upon standards to guide critical ability. Action based upon standards means the establishment of values and criteria, and the ability to describe, define and defend them verbally and intellectually through dialogue. Humanism is characterized by an egocentric approach to religion, education, art, literature, and life. This does not mean that the humanist is an egotist; the humanist looks at things individually and believes the dictum that "man is the measure". The humanitarian would eschew the principles of judgment and selection and replace them with the principle of sympathy. The humanist cannot be this uncritical; being critical means not just appreciation, but the application of standards and judgment, and the ability to discuss them.*

In order to encourage these values, a humanistic education seeks to prepare students for happiness and success. (It also helps prepare persons to face sorrow, disappointment and even tragedy by its emphasis on individuals, nature, and the interrelationsihps in daily life.) This education has an abiding regard for tradition, but not tradition for its own sake. The ideal curriculum embraces much of the wisdom of the past and shows its relationship to the present. For the humanist, the wisdom of the ages is a surer guide to harmony of self and society than is the reconstruction of experiences by up-oriented personalities.

4. Progress in resolving problems must be individual efforts of concerned persons. Each one must do his/her own part.

In this sense, humanism represents an effort by scholars to emphasize the importance of tradition, self-discipline, standards, values and dualism in the formation of a system which attempts to foster the growth of well informed, psychologically adjusted, and socially prepared citizens who may thereby attain the fullness of human happiness. (Foudy: 34)

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*Again we have Eisner's connoisseurship and criticism ideas.

This is not easy. It is done through discipline, selection, judgment, dialogue and attention to the improvement of the individual. Each person must be consciously responsible for individual improvement. What have you done today?

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